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## HOME STUDY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF GERMANY.

THE amount of home work which might reasonably be expected from a boy, has already afforded material for many disputes between teachers and parents, between teachers and head-masters, between the "ordinarius," as the head-teacher of a class is called in Germany, and his colleagues, and in the upper classes it has been discussed even between teachers and pupils. No positive result, however, has, as yet, been obtained. All that the school authorities have accomplished is to limit home-work to two hours in the lower, and to three hours in the middle and upper classes. This order was easy to issue, but difficult to have obeyed. The pupils, it is true, were willing to work but two hours, but what can they do if the teacher does not curtail their task; if, for instance, one alone gives the boys two hours of home-work?

This is the weak point in the scheme, for there is no control over the teachers in the matter of home-work, except in the boarding-schools. In these the study-lessons in the evening or afternoon are superintended by a teacher. When the clock strikes nine the boys must close their books and go to bed. In case they have not been able to do all the work which has been assigned them, the teacher simply states in a book, lying on the desk for that purpose, that the boys have worked diligently and well, but that the task set for them was too great. On the following morning this book is shown to the master for whose lesson the boys are not sufficiently prepared, or whose home-work they have not quite finished, and he will not risk to punish or even to blame the boys but will quietly limit the task for the next day.

With the other schools, however, it is quite a different matter. There is no supervising master at home, and the testimony of the parents is not considered as valid; they are believed to be partial and always inclined to excuse their children's idleness or

slowness in working. So the children must often sit up till late in the night to avoid being scolded or punished by their teachers. There would be a thorough remedy by obliging all teachers to limit their tasks to twenty-five minutes in each branch of instruction. As there are five lessons a day the average time required for home-work would not exceed two hours. But this measure has met with violent opposition. Especially the classical and mathematical teachers raised the objections that this would be restricting the pupils' own free wills, it would deprive them of the possibility of following their inclinations, that some tasks required more than double the time, and that the pupils would become mere machines. Consequently this plan has been dropped; the boys continue to work late into the night, the parents to lament their boys' hard lot, and the teachers to assign excessive home lessons.

But how is it that only in our own time complaints concerning the amount of home-work have been so frequently heard? Why did we not formerly hear of the boys' strength being too severely taxed? There are several reasons for it: First of all the separation of the various branches of instruction, several of which were formerly taught to a class by one master. Now each of the masters teaches only one subject to a class. The system of the *fachlehrer*, *i. e.*, the teacher of a special subject, has become prevalent in Germany. These men are real masters, or even artists in their particular subjects, and they consequently wish their pupils to become so too. The mathematical teacher likes to have only little Euclids in his class, the classical master, Ciceròs or Demostheneses, the teacher of history would see Raumers or Rankes before him, and similarly in the other departments. They lack a just estimate of a boy's ability, and so they become exacting to a degree which is often hardly compatible with sound reason. Why has the ancient system been abolished, under which a single teacher gave instruction in three or four different branches? They knew from their own work what an amount of industry and talent was required in order to be well prepared for a lesson; they never gave too much home-work, because they could survey the whole, which is no longer

possible, since each teacher knows only what he has given and takes no cognizance of what his fellows have assigned.

Another drawback is to be found in the fact that a great many of the teachers — especially in the lower classes where the boys should learn to work — are unmarried. They do not have the chance to observe the over-worked boy. If these teachers were married and saw their own boys sitting before them, they would gladly lessen the tasks and drive the pale faces from the desk to healthful amusement.

To make the misfortune greater, most of the young teachers are officers in the reserve ; they are accustomed to military discipline and consider any incorrectness in the home-work as if it were disobedience to a military order, and ought to be punished with greatest severity. If they but knew the real difficulties under which a boy must often labor in a crowded home, they would certainly change their opinion of the practicability of military discipline in schools.

And why had we not to complain of too much work in our boyhood? Simply because there was in every class one gentleman, or even two, for whom we did nothing, in whose lessons we even ventured to make our preparations for the next lesson. Do you think that in our riper years we condemn them? Not we, surely! We still consider them as benefactors to youth, as oases amidst the vast desert of work which surrounded us on all sides, as men who during the lesson taught us enough of their knowledge, but who spared our leisure hours and left us the afternoons to strengthen our bodies and to relieve our minds.

It is the undeniable merit of the reform method to have brought about some change with regard to home-work. The adherents of this method claim that the principal work which is done in a school must be done in the class-room, under the eyes and with the assistance of the teacher, and not at home. And it is a real pleasure to assist at such a lesson—no dry examining or hearing of lessons which have been learned from books at home, but a brisk fire of questions and answers, of inquiries and explanation. There is also home-work in this method but it is reduced to a minimum. There are words to be

learned at home for the foreign languages, but how easily they are learned if the teacher has first used them in connected sentences where bright boys might even make out their meaning at sight ! How well the pronunciation is remembered, if the words are first heard from the teacher's lips, and if their derivation or formation is shown before they are to be memorized ! As long as the old methods prevailed—and, I am sorry to say, it still prevails in most schools—there were hundreds of words to be learned without the slightest assistance from the teacher. They were *home-work* and had to be crammed into one's head, no matter what time might be required for the process. Even while I write these lines my boy is sitting beside me, and is learning a German poem by heart, a poem which needs thorough explanation in many passages, yet not a word of it has been read or explained in the class. When the time comes for recitation many mistakes will occur which might have been avoided and the boy's work made much easier, had the teacher only taken pains to explain the poem before assigning it as home-work.

And what is the result of this method, the result of this too much home-work ? It is either to make the boys weak and nervous, unable, or at least unwilling, to work, or to make them cheaters or deceivers. Too much home-work compels them to sit up late at night at an age when the body requires a full night's rest ; working so much by lamp-light injures the eyes ; lack of sleep renders them incapable of clear thinking in the morning classes, and weakens their brain. The lack of exercise in the open air deprives their sinews of that power and stalwartness which we need for our compulsory military service. The teachers ought not to forget that in consequence of the political and geographical position of our country, we need not only learned boys but, above all, sturdy fellows who are able to bear arms in defense of their native land.

Beyond a certain point, too much home-work makes the boys refractory and induces them to deceive their teachers. Instead of spending half the night over their books, they persuade some more industrious boy to lend them his completed exercise ; they quickly copy it, adding some blunders to hide

the deceit, and so the work which was intended to be beneficial has become the reverse, by being injurious to their character. The teacher has driven them to despair and is partly responsible for this deception.

There is only one means by which we may alter this state of things in our German schools. Each teacher ought to record in a task-book what amount of home-work he has given to the class for the following day. This work should be limited to thirty minutes in each branch, for the total time then required to prepare for the five morning recitations would be two and a half hours—a sufficiently long time. Any excess by a teacher could be corrected by the ordinarius, to whose care the welfare of the class is confided, and who ought to examine the task-book of his class every day. And if his authority were not sufficient for the purpose, the head-master ought to take the matter in hand and deal with it in such a manner that a repetition of the infringement would be impossible.

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